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UNCLAS KINSHASA 000127

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HIGH MEDIA AUTHORITY SUSPENDS TELEVISION PROGRAM
"FORUM DES MEDIAS" FOR THIRTY DAYS

REFERENCES: A) 04 KINSHASA 2327

B) 04 KINSHASA 2279

1. (SBU) On January 13, the High Media Authority (HAM) suspended the television program "Forum des Medias" for thirty days. In announcing the suspension, the HAM remarked that this program has "proved to be in violation of ethical standards set out under the terms and conditions of its own contract." The HAM also referred to a letter it sent to Congolese National Radio/Television (RTNC) management on May 19, 2004 in which it recommended that RTNC bring "Forum des Medias" into line with its contract and limit its irresponsible reporting, which has been condemned by many viewers.

2. (SBU) "Forum des Medias" has also come under criticism from groups such as Journalists in Danger (JED) and Reporters without Frontiers (RSF). On May 14, 2004 JED and RSF released a joint letter denouncing "Forum des Medias" "dangerous extremism" and "incitements to murder and ethnic discrimination." According to a statement from JED released on January 19, "Forum des Medias" is a "controversial program in which 'guests' are invited each week to discuss the issues of the day. Over the last few months, the program . has become a breeding ground for fanaticisms of every kind."

3. (SBU) On December 19 and 26 "Forum des Medias" devoted a large part of its program to making irresponsible and unfounded allegations against the U.S. (Ref A), although this was almost certainly not a factor in the suspension of the program.

4. (SBU) COMMENT. "Forum des Medias" is a disreputable and sometimes dangerous program, pushing hard-line extremist positions that have occasionally approached the level of "hate media". While the HAM's suspension of the program may have been the right decision given local circumstances, it takes place in the broader context of the HAM's attempts to control the Congolese media (Ref B). Post will continue to closely monitor the status of "Forum des Medias" and the activities of the HAM. We will also continue to engage the President and the staff of the HAM and to convey our views on the importance of developing free and responsible media and an open media environment in the DRC. END COMMENT.

5. (U) Bujumbura minimize considered.

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